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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS' JANUARY 22 MEETING WITH ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE
AND UAE FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified by AMB Michele Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary. UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ) sketched for U/S Burns his impressions during a January 9 visit to Tehran. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed (MbZ) in a wide-ranging discussion expressed strong reservations about free elections in the Middle East, stating that greater democracy in the region will in the short term empower the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hizballah. MbZ voiced deep concerns over Iranian nuclear ambitions, calling on the U.S. to deal with Iran sooner rather than later, and expressed grave misgivings about the effectiveness of the Maliki government in Iraq. MbZ repeated his government's complaint about U.S. public statement criticizing the UAE's "alarming lack of export control oversight." U/S Burns explained the longstanding U.S. commitment to democratic processes, clarified the U.S. strategy in stabilizing Iraq, emphasized the need to persuade Iran to change its calculus, and called on Gulf Arabs to do more to help. The postponement of a visit by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations to UAE was also discussed. End Summary.

AbZ Opens the Meeting - Abu Mazen in Damascus

¶2. (S) U/S Nicholas Burns, accompanied by Ambassador and NEA PDAS James Jeffrey, met on January 22 with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (AbZ). Abdullah opened the meeting with comment on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' visit to Damascus and his own January 9 visit to Tehran. On the Palestinian President's meeting with Hamas leader Khaled Mishal, AbZ observed that Abu Mazen yielded to internal pressure to meet Mishal "but deliberately didn't want to reach an agreement in Damascus."

AbZ in Iran - Mottaki says "no problem"

¶3. (S) Concerning his own visit to Tehran, AbZ claimed to be "shocked to hear everyone in Iran saying that the U.S. wanted to start a war." He said it was really "quite funny" to hear this constant refrain and was struck by how much the Iranians seemed to be caught up with the glories of their imperial past. In response to Burns' question what FM Mottaki had to say on the nuclear issue, AbZ noted Mottaki's response that "Iran didn't have a problem" after the passage of UNSCR 1737 and that Mottaki had even boasted that Iran had been approached with investments of \$50 billion since the sanctions were imposed. AbZ was skeptical of the "bizarre" bragging about investments, noting that the UAE did not invest in Iran. Asked whether Iran "got the message" and was feeling isolated, AbZ replied, "Almost, but you are not there yet. I don't believe they feel isolated yet." AbZ said he was pleased that the French had cancelled their visit to Tehran, and observed that it was one thing for a Minister from a neighboring country in the Middle East to visit Iran and quite another for a European.

Enter MbZ: Elections -- "The Middle East is not California"

¶4. (S) Mohamed bin Zayed entered, immediately focusing the discussion on the phenomenon of elections, and asked why the U.S. supports elections in the Middle East given the results in places like

Palestine. Burns explained the American commitment to the democratic process and noted that even the Palestinians, despite unhappiness with the Hamas electoral victory, now have a more sophisticated political life than was the case 20 years ago and a political system that would over time promote stability.

15. (S) MbZ said he did not agree with promoting elections -- "if we want to make peace." "The Middle East," he insisted, "is not California." In the post 9/11 world "in any Muslim country you will see the same result." While members of the U.S. Congress and Senate are loyal to their states and their constituencies, the masses in the Middle East would tend to go with their hearts and vote overwhelmingly for the Muslim Brotherhood and the jihadists represented by Hamas and Hizballah. Correcting the situation required education, according to MbZ, a process that will take 25 to 50 years of focused effort to turn around deeply-rooted cultural phenomena. In the western part of Abu Dhabi emirate alone, he said, the UAE has closed down 80% of 262 so-called "talebani Quran schools," to which no Emirati household would refuse to send its sons. With regard to the wide and deep appeal of fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East, MbZ stated: "I am an Arab, I am a Muslim, and I pray. And in the 1970s and early 1980s I was one of them. I believe these guys have an agenda." MbZ conceded that his brother, Abdullah supported elections more than he had and noted that "maybe he doesn't completely agree with me." Explaining the UAE gradualist approach with regard to the recent Federal National Council elections, MbZ said it is important to start the process right.

16. (S) Burns commented that all U.S. administrations have worked to promote democracy and that the current administration clearly sees it as a priority. The approach, he said, is different in different countries and elections tend to confer legitimacy -- even if the results are not always welcome. He noted that "the U.S. does not seek to impose a detailed blueprint on other countries but that

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countries should find their way to a democratic future. MbZ countered that while he appreciated that fact, "free elections in the Middle East" could eventually mean that the U.S. would "have to find somewhere else to get 17 million barrels (of oil) a day." In Iraq, MbZ said, elections had produced "a disaster." As for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and pressure from jihadists inspired by Iran, he said he was not worried about the UAE, which could hold out for a long time: "The Iranians will have a hard time coming here, but we will lose Arab countries like Lebanon and Palestine. Thank God for Hosni Mubarak (described as a family friend of the Al Nahyan). If Egypt has free elections, they will elect the Muslim Brothers." There were three large Islamic countries to worry about, according to MbZ: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

No Peace with Hamas; Iranian Nuclear Ambitions

17. (S) With Hamas in power, MbZ said, there would be no peace -- just as in Iran with Ahmadinejad. MbZ said it didn't matter who the electorate picked to lead the country, Iran wants to be a regional superpower and wants a nuclear weapon -- not just nuclear energy for electricity. Reflecting on the UAE and Iran's almost 40-year history of political contact, MbZ cited "a brother" of Ahmadinejad who told him once that Iran would not rest until it had acquired a nuclear capability.

UAE Loyalties - Call of "Some Holy Man in Mekkah"

18. (S) Referring to the UAE situation, MbZ opined that of the 60,000 soldier UAE armed forces and its loyalties, some 50 to 80% would respond to a call of "some holy man in Mekkah." He repeatedly alluded to being "stoned" by his own citizens if he pushed some subjects too openly. Acknowledging the prodding by the U.S. to hold elections, MbZ said the process would take at least 20 years and that focus should be on the next generation. "When I travel to Saudi Arabia, I meet with 80-85 year old Saudi leaders who never learned of the internet until they were 70. There is a big gap in Saudi Arabia." MbZ said the UAE is addressing the educational aspect of the problem by privatizing government schools with the aim of privatizing 25% in 5 years so that there will eventually be 0% "talebani Quran schools."

¶9. (S) Hizballah, MbZ noted, is more dangerous even than Al Qaeda and "did a very tough job on Israel this summer." Burns stated that his interlocutor had made many compelling points, that we agree on the high stakes and dangers posed by radical Islam, and that U.S. policy is not simplistic. The world is changing and it is not realistic to think that things can stay the same, Burns said. In the four GCC+2 meetings Secretary Rice has had since September, "we recognized the threat you have cited and the clash between the forces of Reason vs. Extremism. How can we work together with you to limit the power of Iran and radical groups like Hizballah?" MbZ injected that it is very difficult for the UAE to talk in front of the full GCC+2, and that the UAE only felt comfortable talking in front of the Bahrainis, the Saudis and the Jordanians - but not necessarily the rest.

Iran in Iraq: "Better Organized Than You Believe"

¶10. (S) MbZ said that he felt Washington had only begun listening to the Arab Gulf region about four months ago. On matters like executing Saddam, MbZ said it didn't matter whether it was on Eid or on a Friday; he was a criminal. MbZ recalled a May 2003 meeting with former SecDef Rumsfeld and DepSecDef Wolfowitz, in which he said he warned against the influence of Chalabi and his Iranian connections, stressing the point that "Iran is better organized than you believe." Iran, he continued, has established an excellent network in Iraq after 8 years of war in the 1980s. Burns noted that while some mistakes were made, the U.S. is not leaving Iraq, and we intend to succeed.

Syria - limited cards to play

¶11. (S) Turning briefly to Syria, MbZ commented that Bashar Al Asad is "very weak" while noting his brother Abdullah's "good relationship personally with Bashar." Bashar has a limited number of cards to play and counts heavily on Iranian support, his status as host of Hamas' Khaled Mishal, and the connection with Hizballah in Lebanon.

Deal With Iran Sooner Rather Than Later

¶12. (S) Returning to Ahmadinejad, MbZ said the western media is producing valuable P.R. for the Iranian president, in fact building him up; he indicated his preference for "dealing with Iran sooner rather than later." Asked what he meant by that, MbZ replied: "Whatever will stop Iran --" adding quickly "I don't necessarily mean boots on the ground." Iran, according to MbZ, has "sleepers" around the world and the U.S. is not sending a strong enough message. While Iran is a neighbor and has more investment in the UAE than does the U.S., MbZ said it is necessary "to take stronger action against them." A lot of Iranians are traveling back and forth to North Korea and we will eventually find out that they have made a nuclear test. Israelis, said Burns, agree with you and asked whether Gulf Arabs can

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do more to help, particularly in terms of influencing the Russians and the Chinese. Burns clarified that while we need to push back against Iran, the U.S. is not looking for a fight, though we need to persuade the Iranians to change their calculus.

¶13. (S) MbZ predicted that Europe will act when the Shihab missiles are launched and they feel vulnerable, but that the GCC countries see Iran as a continuing threat although some have different agendas and a different sense of priorities. For instance, Kuwait has a problem as a neighbor and Qatar has another point of view. With some vehemence, MbZ declared: "I am ready to run. I am not waiting for the Qataris." He added: "I don't see any evidence that Iran will talk to you. You shouldn't challenge a guy who has nothing to lose." Burns noted that since the U.S. and Iran have not had diplomatic relations for 28 years, our knowledge is limited. The U.S. assumption, however, is that Iran is not a monolithic political entity. Noting that the EU may assume that Rafsanjani would make a deal on the nuclear issue, Burns stated that the U.S. cannot take the military option off the table although we are pursuing a non-military course.

Stabilizing Iraq

¶14. (S) MbZ stated that the first requirement for the region is for Iraq to be "stabilized," expressing doubt that the Maliki government will produce a solution no matter how many more U.S. troops are added. At this point PDAS Jeffrey was asked by Burns to explain the new strategy. Jeffrey told the Emiratis that the U.S. -- and the President -- is betting that this Iraqi government can take corrective action and if not we will tailor our actions accordingly. An additional 5+ brigades will provide the ability to control and stabilize the 9 districts of Baghdad. Issues facing the Iraqi army include training and better integrating the Sunnis. The \$10 billion of unused oil revenues will reinforce the stabilization program. There is also a need for Sunnis especially to speak out against the bombers. MbZ agreed that intimidation by the jihadists of those who would speak out is a huge factor and noted that here again cultural motivation (the desire for revenge) is a big element complicating the situation on the ground in Iraq: "If someone kills my cousin, I will take him down."

MbZ: Iraq Needs a Secular Leader

¶15. (S) According to MbZ, Iraq needs a strong secular leader, "someone like Iyad Allawi," for whose support he said the UAE had spent lots of money. In Iraq, MbZ ventured, "you need your man, but someone without American identity -- the kiss of death -- and you need to protect him." The problem, he said, is that too many Iraqi leaders lived for a long period in Iran or outside of Iraq, and that Iran is paying out a lot of money to buy influence in Iraq. MbZ aide Yousef Al Otaiba asserted that the Iranians were more effective at distributing funding to further their goals. Jeffrey explained that the security forces in Iraq could not be the army of a politician who wins only 9-10% of the vote (e.g. Allawi). There must be a democratic basis for our support. At the moment Prime Minister Maliki is being put to the test and is being evaluated.

Lebanon Assistance and Reckoning with the Arab Street

¶16. (S) Conversation shifted to Lebanon, with Burns noting that the U.S. is placing a sizeable amount on the table in assistance for the Siniora government at the upcoming Paris meeting. MbZ said "you can count on us, but we want one thing" and proceeded to complain about a USG December public statement criticizing the UAE for lax export controls. MbZ claimed that in terms of interdiction requests the UAE cannot always assist and often needs more information in order to act. When the issue of UAE cooperation or lack thereof with the U.S. gets into the media, according to MbZ, his Arab "cultural side" comes out and he has to reckon with the Arab street which says: "How come you do whatever the Americans say?"

Postponed Visit of American Jewish Organization to UAE; Israel no enemy

¶17. (S) Burns also raised the visit of the Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Yousef Al Otaiba responded that it was best to postpone due to "security concerns" presented by the publication of the Marc Perelman article on the visit in The Forward. Speaking for MbZ, Al Otaiba claimed that the group had proceeded in contradiction to UAE advice not to publicize the visit. Burns noted that members of the group that he met in Israel had been very pleased at the prospect of visiting the UAE; he won from Al Otaiba a statement that the postponement was not, in effect, a cancellation. MbZ went on at length to explain the UAE's commitment to religious tolerance, citing the continuing support by the Al Nahyan family for the work of American (Christian) medical missionaries in Al Ain since the late 1950s and the discovery of archeological ruins of an historic church on a UAE island -- in a Muslim country. He stated that the UAE does not look on Israel as an enemy.

¶18. (U) U/S Burns has cleared this message.

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